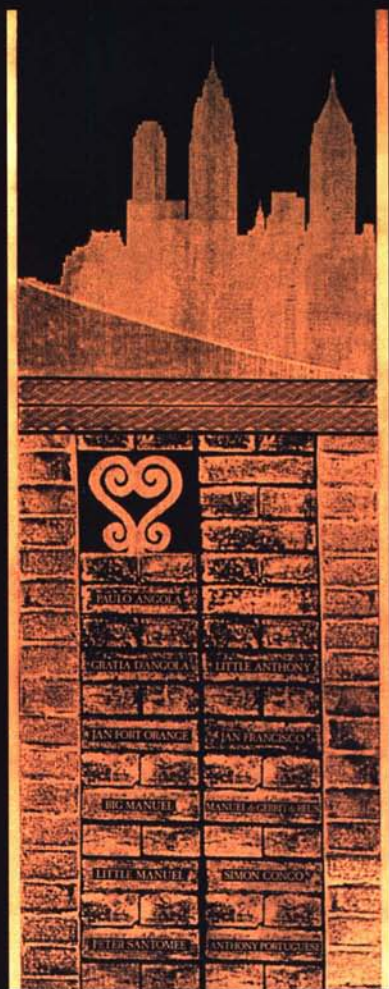


RENEWAL



TOMIE ARAI

MEMORIALIZATION OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND



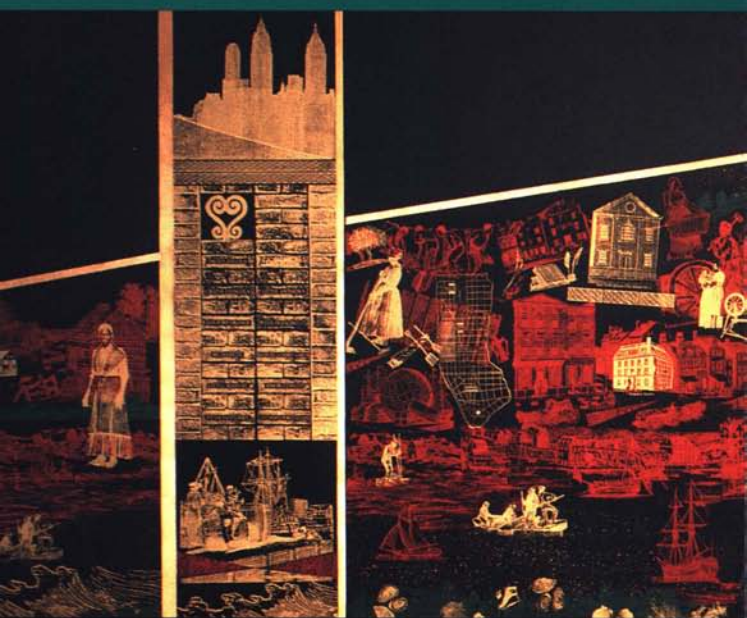
More than 200 years had passed when, in May of 1991, the African Burial Ground was unearthed in New York City during the pre-construction phase for a federal office building. The recovery of this important cultural resource deeply impacted

the descendant and broader community, bringing about a renewed awareness that has motivated dynamic discourse on cultural significance and historic preservation. Its rediscovery afforded a rare opportunity for reclaiming a neglected part of American history. The site was unique due to its prominence as a physical reminder of New York's early African community. At the time of rediscovery, it was recognized as the largest and only known urban pre-Revolutionary African cemetery in America.

The African Burial Ground is believed to have encompassed five to six acres of lower Manhattan. During the 1700's when the burial ground was mainly in use, Africans made up from 14.4% to 20.9% of the population. Consistent with the marginal status of Africans in colonial society, the burial ground was described as a desolate piece of unappropriated land and was located outside of city limits. According to city maps, by the late 1700's the oldest portions of the cemetery were already being covered over by development. As the city expanded, the existence of the African Burial Ground was eventually forgotten.

Through community activism and commitment the African Burial Ground was awarded designations as both a National Historic Landmark and a New York City historic district.

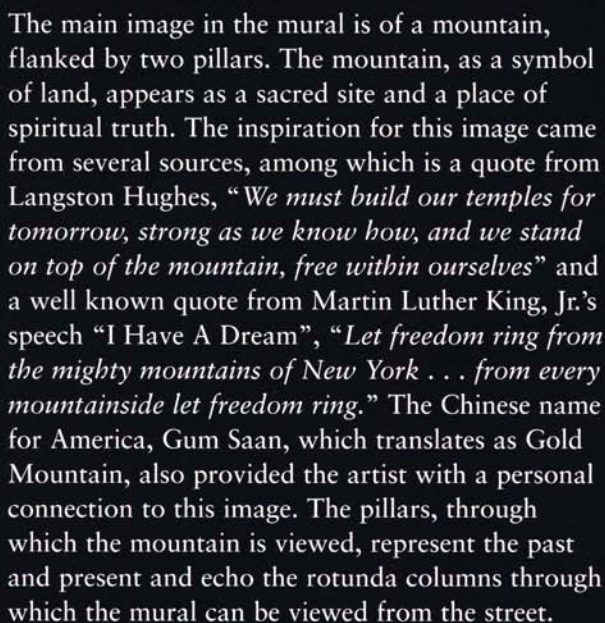
RENEWAL



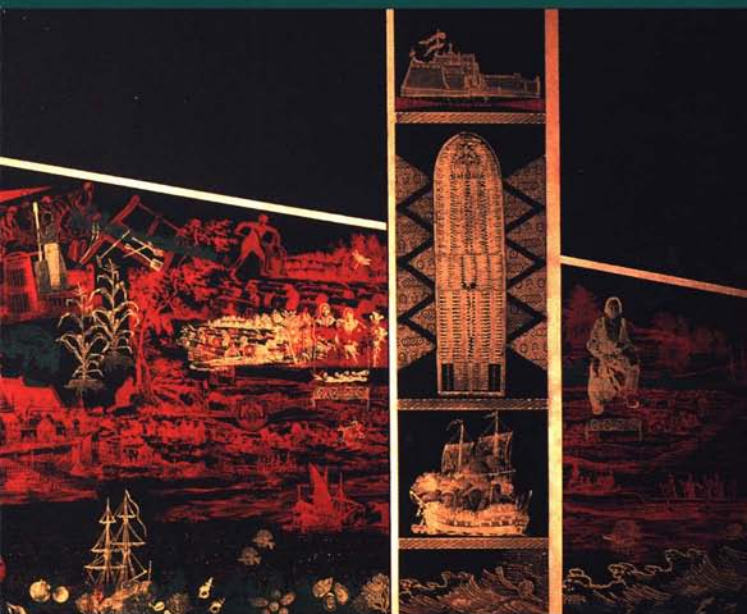
In her work *Renewal*, Tomie Arai commemorates the discovery of the African Burial Ground and honors the ancestors of New York's African American descendant community. Through the images presented in this silk-screened mural, Ms. Arai encourages us to reflect on the lives of the people buried here. The mural pays tribute to the first enslaved Africans whose labor helped to build colonial New York. Spanning the period of time which covers the recorded existence of the African Burial Ground, 1712 to 1792, the mural also includes historical imagery of Dutch and British colonial rule, the slave trade in New York, the American Revolution, the Abolitionist movement, and the emancipation of enslaved Africans in New York in 1827.



In *Renewal*, a narrative is presented as a series of overlapping images arranged to suggest the process of archeology — digging through layers of historical fragments in order to reveal an untold story about a period in time. Similar to the archeological process of discovery and the painstaking sifting through information, there is no chronology of events presented in the mural. A 'time line' has been replaced with a layered reading of events which, for the artist, more closely resembles the actual way in which individuals learn about the past. The significance of the site lies in the unveiling of a hidden history that will have a tremendous impact on our understanding of the present.



Renewal, 1998, silkscreened mural, 7 1/2' x 38'
Federal Office Building, 290 Broadway, New York City



The image of the mountain rising from the water also refers to the history of New York as a thriving harbor and port of entry, as well as one of the major centers of British slave trade in America. The Middle Passage and the watery holocaust of the Atlantic Ocean is represented in the pillar on the mural's right. The pillar on the left contains a skyline of New York. Below the skyline is a foundation of bricks which represent the physical foundation that the city's wealth was built upon. The bricks contain the names of the first eleven Africans brought to America through the Dutch slave trade. At the center of the mural is a reproduction of an 18th century map of the Burial Ground. Above the map, the simple artifacts unearthed at the burial site – buttons, coins, shroud pins, and beads – become a tangible connection to the past; and the talismans for a renewed vision of the future.



TOMIE ARAI

Tomie Arai, community artist and activist, was born in New York City in 1949, and has worked there for the past 30 years. Trained as a printmaker, Ms. Arai is especially interested in exploring the relationship of art to history and the role that memory plays in retelling a collective past. Through the use of autobiography, family stories and photographs, historical material and oral histories, Ms. Arai creates installations and works on paper that help her to establish a personal sense of place and community.

Ms. Arai has painted murals with community groups on the Lower East Side, taught art to children in New York City public schools, and has designed permanent public works of art for the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York City Percent for Art Program, and the New York City Board of Education.

Her work has been exhibited nationally and is in the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, New York City; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

She is a recent recipient of two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships in Printmaking; a 1994 National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowship; a 1995 Joan Mitchell Visual Arts Grant; and a 1997 MidAtlantic Arts Foundation Visual Artists Residency. In 1997, she was one of ten women nationwide to receive an Anonymous Was A Woman grant for achievement in the visual arts.



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